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Chairman: Mr. TEIRLINCK (Belgium)

Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions: Mr. MSELLE

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AGENDA ITEM 105: REVIEW OF THE EFFICIENCY OF THE ADMINISTRATIVE AND FINANCIAL FUNCTIONING OF THE UNITED NATIONS

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The meeting was called to order at 10.20 a.m.

AGENDA ITEM 105: REVIEW OF THE EFFICIENCY OF THE ADMINISTRATIVE AND FINANCIAL FUNCTIONING OF THE UNITED NATIONS (A/49/16 (Part II) and A/C.5/49/1)

1. Mr. CONNOR (Under-Secretary-General for Administration and Management) recalled the principles that had guided the establishment of the system of accountability and responsibility described in the documents that had been distributed to delegations. The system included the four elements mentioned in General Assembly resolution 48/218. The objective of the system was to create a mission-driven and result-oriented organization in which the Secretariat and the intergovernmental bodies not only interacted but, since they enjoyed mutual confidence, were capable of performing their respective functions.

2. The Secretariat had defined a framework for what would be the most radical reform ever undertaken by an organization to change its management methods. In particular, the process of assigning responsibility, delegating authority and ensuring accountability would represent a flow of interrelated actions towards the achievement of clearly defined objectives. An established set of procedures would ensure adequate monitoring and control. The chart annexed to the Secretary-General's report (A/C.5/49/1) illustrated that mechanism. Programme managers who would be held accountable for delivery of related outputs must also be entrusted with corresponding resources and given authority commensurate with their level of responsibility and accountability. Finally, the system would cover all staff at every level and at all duty stations and missions.

3. The responsibility for administering the Organization was entrusted to the Secretary-General and then assigned, through the hierarchy of the Secretariat, to senior officials and programme directors, the officers whom they supervised and, finally, to all other staff. Managers must have the human and financial resources and the corresponding authority to carry out the tasks entrusted to them - authority being the legitimate power delegated to each established position of management. The outcome, whether satisfactory or not, would be attributed to the efforts of the person to whom the task had been assigned. Accountability for the resources provided would be established in direct proportion to the responsibility assigned and the authority delegated.

4. Mr. SEVAN (Assistant Secretary-General for Conference and Support Services) introduced the measures that the Secretariat had taken or was planning to take following its in-depth consultations with all heads of departments, offices, programmes and regional commissions, both at Headquarters and elsewhere, and staff representatives. In his report, the Secretary-General emphasized that the concept of accountability and responsibility would include all fields of activity, not only financial management, and would apply to all staff members. The new system also emphasized the Department of Administration and Management's role in providing administrative support.

5. The establishment of an effective, integrated system was based on the following premises: responsibility for achieving strategic imperatives must be

clearly defined at all levels; the mandates and guidelines must be clear; the legislative norms defining the statutory and organizational framework of the Organization must also be clear, comprehensible and up to date; and information and policy guidance should be communicated to officers verbally or in writing.

6. Far too often, no one paid any heed to reports and programmes that had been adopted. That was particularly true of the medium-term plan: once that very important document was adopted, not much reference was made to it until the preparation of the programme budget. Moreover, the programme budget was not the reference document that it should be. Aware of that situation, the Secretariat had prepared a prototype of a new format of the medium-term plan, which had been submitted to the Advisory Committee and the Fifth Committee in document A/49/301. The proposed programme budget outline for the biennium 1996-1997 (A/49/310) reflected the continuing efforts that were being made to improve the content of that document and the programme budget. The Secretary-General wished to make the programme budget a real tool to which all programme directors could refer in order to determine what resources were available to them; sometimes they tended to run at high speed without bothering to check how much gas remained in their tank. They would soon be receiving guidelines that would help them prepare the draft programme budget for the biennium 1996-1997. The Secretary-General would ensure that budget papers were issued on time to the Advisory Committee and all other competent intergovernmental bodies.

7. Other measures that would also be taken before 1 January 1995 included the definition of the statutory and organizational framework of the Organization. With regard to procurement, the Department of Administration and Management and the Department of Peace-keeping Operations had decided to request an independent high-level group of experts from Member States to review current procedures. The goal was to establish a competitive, fair and transparent system of procurement that would help develop the capacity to screen, evaluate and monitor contractors. In the view of increasing procurement needs, consideration was being given to the possibility of establishing a full-time contracts committee. Finally, there were plans to provide training for procurement officers.

8. The Secretariat was currently revising the format of the Organizational Manual and preparing a new organizational chart that would reflect the restructuring. A new telephone directory had just been issued. A number of circulars by the Secretary-General and administrative instructions were currently being revised.

9. With regard to the provision of information and policy guidance, the Secretary-General had established a Task Force on Operations and convened periodic meetings of senior managers in the economic and social field. In 1994 he had established an Advisory Panel on Management and Finance which met at least once a month and also held special meetings on such subjects as the accountability and responsibility system or the outline of the programme budget. The senior officials responsible for the budget and personnel and executive officers at Headquarters had also held monthly meetings to ensure smooth administrative backstopping for the Organization's work programme. Workshops had also been organized in 1994 in individual units to clarify their mission,

objectives, division of responsibilities, priorities, constraints and challenges. Lastly, a new performance appraisal system had been introduced on an experimental basis.

10. In 1995 the Secretariat would take further steps to improve the system: establishment of a closer relationship between programmes and the allocation of budgetary resources under the proposed programme budget for 1996-1997; review of the Regulations and Rules Governing Programme Planning, and updating of the Organizational Manual, the Personnel Manual, the Financial Manual and the "Code of Conduct" for international civil servants.

11. Managers and staff had to understand fully the authority given to them in order to carry out their responsibilities effectively. It was essential for directors, senior managerial staff and management in general to have access on a routine basis to precise and up-to-date information on the volume and deployment of the resources at their disposal. It was also important to strike an appropriate balance between the need for central control and coordination and the requirement that heads of units should have control over the resources appropriated to their programmes. Managers should be empowered to take decisions on the use of approved resources and on programme implementation at their level. Appropriate training was needed in order to enable programme managers to exercise authority judiciously and staff members to carry out their functions effectively and efficiently.

12. A number of measures would be adopted in those areas by 1 January 1995. Financial and human resources management tools would be distributed to managerial staff according as they became available through the Integrated Management Information System. A working group would be established to review the question of delegation of authority at Headquarters and, in the light of preliminary findings, at offices away from Headquarters. The rules and procedures governing the delegation of authority in the area of personnel administration, finance and procurement to peace-keeping and other field operations would be reviewed as a matter of priority. In the area of human resources management, a less rigid series of rules would be devised for the recruitment and administration of staff on contracts of limited duration, particularly for peace-keeping and other field operations. Managers had to be clear about the extent of their authority to make decisions. The Advisory Panel on Management and Finance was preparing to address the question of defining the authority of staff members at the D-1 and D-2 levels. The persons concerned were already required to prepare a management plan every six months for transmission to the Executive Office of the Secretary-General. That provision would subsequently be extended to staff members at other levels. With the help of that mechanism, the Secretariat could establish performance indicators in relation to time-limited objectives. The new system also attached considerable importance to the training of programme managers, supervisors and the staff as a whole.

13. Circulars, administrative instructions and other documents concerning the delegation of authority were to be published in 1995. A mechanism would be established to facilitate and monitor the decentralization of authority to

offices away from Headquarters, starting with peace-keeping operations. Lastly, appropriate mechanisms would be established at all levels to ensure accountability.

14. As the Secretary-General had stated in his report, an effective system of accountability and responsibility depended on the clarity of objectives and rules, resulting in a clear mission statement for the Organization from which its strategic imperatives could be derived. The large number of existing legislative instruments made it difficult - at times, impossible - for the Secretariat to ensure that their directives were consistently and properly applied. Managers and staff currently wasted considerable time that could have been spent on programme implementation dealing with the plethora of legislative instruments and the increasing number of reports demanded. The time had come to carry out a thorough review of the Organization's legislative instruments with a view to simplifying and clarifying them. A straightforward and coherent body of legislative norms should be established to assist managers in improving the running of the Organization's activities.

15. Mr. SINGH (India) noted that the objectives described in the Secretary-General's report were identical to those that had led to the establishment of the Committee for Programme and Coordination. He welcomed the initiatives taken by the Secretariat to improve the functioning of the Organization but considered that only the effective application of a system of rewards and penalties would enable the desired results to be achieved.

The meeting rose at 10.55 a.m.